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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [KDEM](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD: UNUSUAL FORWARD-LEANING STATEMENT ON ISRAEL RAPIDLY WALKED BACK

REF: CAIRO 3118

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs, William R. Stewart, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

LEANING TOO FAR FORWARD?

[¶1.](#) (SBU) In an October 13 press interview, prominent Muslim Brotherhood (MB) moderate and Political Bureau member Essam El Erian surprised MB officials and other observers alike with forward-leaning comments on Israel that seemed to break with the MB's traditional strong anti-Israel stance. El Erian told the London-based newspaper "Al Hayat" that, "should the MB win power, it would recognize Israel and respect treaties. As for the Camp David Accords, they would have to be changed according to what is suitable for us, which does not mean that we would be declaring any war." Following subsequent reports in the Egyptian media that senior MB leaders were unhappy with his remarks, El Erian attempted to walk back his initial statements, telling the Islam Online website on October 17 that, "The MB considers the existence of Israel as invalid. What is built on invalidity cannot be recognized. Should the soon-to-be-born MB party win power in Egypt, it would deal with Israel with political realism." El Erian subsequently told newspapers that he was misquoted by "Al Hayat," which the well-regarded newspaper vigorously denies.

CLARIFICATIONS ...

[¶2.](#) (SBU) On October 20, in a TV interview on the "Cairo Today" show (offered on a satellite channel), El Erian clarified, "The MB's stance is constant with regard to the issue of the Zionist aggression, the Palestinian cause, and the usurpation of Palestinian territories. This is a basic and unchanged position and we are trying to find ways to eliminate the consequences of such problems. We stated clearly that the MB has not and will never recognize an entity which has usurped a land by force, expelled its people and displaced roughly 5-6 million refugees. I also stated very clearly that any democratically elected Egyptian government will inherit a legal reality, and it will have to deal with this reality through democratic mechanisms and not through governmental measures." In an October 20 article posted on the MB's internet website, El Erian was quoted as saying, "Dealing realistically with Israel by the MB's future party, if it assumes power, does not mean recognizing the state of Israel Undoubtedly, Hamas does not recognize Israel. However, it deals with political realism with Israel through dealing with it to address people's lives in Gaza. It deals with Israeli municipalities, Israeli banks, power, water, and energy companies. However, we have heard no one

saying that Hamas recognizes Israel because of these dealings with Israeli institutions."

¶3. (SBU) The MB's leadership reacted strongly to El Erian's initial comments, wQ Supreme Guide Mohamed Mahdy Akef telling "Al Hayat" in an October 18 interview that, "freedom of expression is everyone's right in the MB. However, the final decision lies with the Supreme Guide. The MB does not, and will never, recognize Israel, since there is nothing called Israel in our dictionary." Deputy Supreme Guide Mohamed Habib told the MB's website, "There can be no recognition of Israel. As for the signed treaties between Egypt and Israel, agreements between respectable countries are from time to time reviewed by people, and through their elected representatives. There is no harm that such treaties also be presented to the people for review in a national referendum in case there is an essential change in the treaty." Other MB officials were quoted as asserting that El Erian did not mean recognizing Israel, but only discussed, "political realism in dealing with the Israeli entity."

COMMENT

¶4. (C) While El Erian clearly exceeded the MB's red lines by mentioning recognition of Israel, his advocacy of "political realism" in dealing with Israel did not seem to provoke strong reaction within the MB's ranks, and could signal some slight shifts in the MB's thinking on how to approach the vexed issue of the Egyptian-Israeli relationship. The timing of El Erian's forward-leaning remarks is curious: the Islamist group has recently come under strong public criticism for it's draft political party platform (see reftel

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for details). Some Cairene analysts speculate that, with his unusual comments about Israel, El Erian was trying to draw attention away from the brouhaha surrounding the conservative slant of the draft party platform, and tangibly demonstrate to observers that there are pragmatic, moderate leaders within the organization.

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